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Collective Responsibility and the Fallacies of Composition and Division

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Title: Collective Responsibility and the Fallacies of Composition and Division

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Introductory Remarks

Over the last several years, I have spent considerable time thinking and writing about political and ethical issues pertaining to themes in social philosophy, ranging from trust and distrust to forgiveness, acknowledgement, and reconciliation. In reading and conversation, I have been struck by the many opportunities posed for committing the fallacies of composition and division. It is common, natural, and apparently irresistible, to use the same terms (trust, distrust, revenge, forgiveness, reconciliation, acknowledgement, and responsibility, to cite just a few) in both individual and group contexts. Though there are many problems, in the end I would defend this dual use of language -- for various reasons, including the fact that resisting it in the name of metaphysical purity would require radical surgery of ordinary language, were it possible at all. ¹Nevertheless this commonality of language presents many temptations to move back and forth erroneously and simplistically from the individual level to that of the group.

Before moving into my specific theme of collective responsibility and the fallacies of composition and division, I would like to set the stage by describing some such temptations.

In 1997, British Prime Minister Tony Blair apologized to the Irish for the English government's role in the Irish potato famine, which had happened some one hundred and fifty years earlier. The apology was issued on behalf of one collectivity, the United Kingdom, to another collectivity, Ireland, and Blair, obviously, was a spokesperson for the former. Some critics objected to the issuance of this apology on the grounds that Blair had nothing to do with the original events.² As an individual, Tony Blair could not have played any role in causing or aggravating the potato famine; because he is not as an individual responsible for the famine, he is under no obligation as an individual to apologize for it; in fact, as an individual, he cannot appropriately apologize. But the same cannot be said of the relevant collectivity in the case. The government of the United Kingdom did exist at the relevant time, and insofar as its policies worked aggravated suffering during the famine, there is a point in acknowledgement and apology by that government. The argument that *Blair* shouldn't apologize on behalf of the collectivity because he wasn't responsible *as an individual* depends on a shift from the individual level to the collective level, suggestive of the fallacy of composition. In a context where there is a question of a group, G, being accountable for W, and X is an individual who is a member of G, it does not follow from the fact that X did not commit W that G is not properly accountable for it. To make such a move is to ignore admonitions underlying the fallacies of composition and division.

¹ In Trudy Govier, *Social That and Human Communities* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's 1997), Chapter 9, and Trudy Govier and Wilhelm Verwoerd, "Trust and the Problem of National Reconciliation," Forthcoming, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*.

² David Walker, "Blair apologizes for potato famine," *Globe and Mail*, June 3, 1997.

Significant events pertaining to aboriginal-white reconciliation in Australia involve the same questionable shifting between individual and collective levels. A strongly worded government report, 'Bringing Them Home,' reported a stunning level of suffering by aboriginal children and parents damaged under a government policy of abducting light-skinned aboriginal children from their homes in order to assimilate them into the mainstream white Australian society. Australia's contemporary Reconciliation movement is dealing with this issue of the 'Stolen Generation.' One response to the report was the institution of a 'Sorry Day,' and in conjunction with Sorry Day, many white Australians signed statements of apology and expressed their sorrow and regret about what their government had done to these children and parents. But Sorry Day was later challenged on the grounds that individual white Australians should not be led to feel guilty about past government policy. Most of them had had not direct involvement in abductions, and many had not thought about, or even known about, the practice. In the summer of 2000, Australian Prime Minister Michael Howard, rejected the idea of a *state apology* on the grounds that since *individual* white Australians were not responsible, no apology from the *state* was appropriate. This position involves a logically suspicious exoneration. 'If G acted wrongly, then all the I within G must have acted wrongly, and it is not the case that all the I acted wrongly, so G didn't do so, and G has nothing to apologize for.' The conditional premise embraces the fallacy of Division; the shift purportedly justified by the argument, from individual exoneration to collective exoneration, could be said to embrace the fallacy of Composition.

Another context for Composition and Division may be found in reflections on Presentism. The employment of contemporary values in judging policies and actions of the past is said by some to amount to a systematic mistake or 'fallacy' (in the broad sense), and the label Presentism is used to refer to the belief that this is the case. The doctrine of Presentism may be interpreted so as to offer some healthy reminders. For example, we should not misinterpret the actions and narratives of persons in the past by anachronistically and carelessly interpret them in the light of present-day values. An implication one might extract from the doctrine of Presentism is that the systemic and presently recognized wrongness of such *systems* as patriarchy, colonialism, apartheid, and even slavery does not entail that every individual person and action to be found within those systems should be tarred with the same moral brush. If A is B's servant, within a colonial society, the relationship between A and B might be characterized solely with reference in systemic colonialist terms, and under such a characterization, judged to be seriously flawed according to present values. But accounts of the fallacy of division would remind us that the systemic flaws of colonialism do not automatically transfer to all *individual* events and actions within the system.³

The concept of *reconciliation*⁴ is probably for most of us paradigmatically individualistic. We think, for instance, of a man and woman reconciling after a lover's quarrel, with tears and hugs and kisses. And yet there is also talk of national reconciliation. Obviously such talk doesn't mean that many thousands of previously opposed blacks and whites, Serbs and Bosnians, or

³ This example is based on an actual case. An adult daughter and her mother became seriously estranged because the daughter so strongly criticized her mother's stories of colonial times, many of which featured a friendship with a servant who, according to the mother, had dearly loved the family. The daughter was unable to accept that warm emotions could exist in a relationship structured by a morally flawed system. It is she to whom I would attribute a version of Presentism committing incautiously the Fallacy of Division.

⁴ Explained and argued in detail in Govier and Verwoerd, "Trust and the Problem of National Reconciliation."

natives and settlers, are embracing each other with hugs and kisses and commencing or recommencing intimate relationships as individuals. The very notion of 'national reconciliation' requires clarification. Some have suggested that national reconciliation must be something quite different from reconciliation between individuals. Perhaps when large groups of people are involved, reconciliation can only mean nonviolent coexistence, or the building of workable collective institutions. Perhaps it means the establishment of a common narrative. Or perhaps a general account of "reconciliation" can be articulated, using the notion of trust in a central role, applying to both levels. In discussions of reconciliation, it is easy to confuse the collective and individual levels. In South Africa, where the topic of national reconciliation is nothing if not a political hot potato, there have been some striking individual cases of forgiveness and reconciliation featuring white policemen and black activist victims. There have also been many striking cases of continued animosity and the failure of individual forgiveness.⁵ To infer from either success or failure on the individual level, any conclusion about success or failure on the national level would be to make a mistake, suggestive of the Fallacy of Composition.

There are many plausible explanations as to why such mistakes should be so natural and tempting. Ontologically, the collective is dependent on the individual, which fundamental fact of metaphysics has profound implications. Collectives must be composed of individuals; there will be no state or nation, no society, no ethnic group, no corporation, family, club, mob, or community unless there are individual human beings. Much terminology has as its primary context of application individuals and their relationships. Thus, meanings at the purely collective level are parasite on the individual level and require clarification. A woman may distrust her colleague; a government may distrust an ethnic association. A man may forgive his wife; a nation may forgive a crime. A natural approach is broadly reductionistic; we seek to explain what is meant in the collective context by referring to attitudes and actions of member individuals, looking to individual cases in our attempts to understand the collective ones.

Highly significant from the moral point of view is the fact that penalties or punishments imposed on collectives nearly always devolve onto individuals, who are the ones to suffer pain and injustice. After the Versailles Treaty, post World War I, individual Germans suffered severe food shortages and unemployment. And UN-imposed sanctions on Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War, it was individual Iraqi's, often children, who suffered and died.

Composition and Division

The fallacies of composition and division may be defined as follows.

In the fallacy of *composition*, a conclusion about a whole, group, or collectivity is reached on the basis of premises about parts of that whole, or the individual members of that group or collectivity. The reasoning goes straightforwardly from the smaller unit to the whole composed of smaller units—from smaller scale to larger scale—or as is often said, from the micro level to the macro level, without the establishment of any appropriate link between the levels.

⁵ See Piet Miering, "The Baruti versus the lawyers," and Jakes Gerwels, "National Reconciliation," in Wilhelm Verwoerd and Charles Villa-Villencio, editors, *Looking Back, Reaching Forward. Reflections on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2000).

In the *fallacy of division*, a conclusion about a part of a whole or individual member of a group or collectivity is reached on the basis of premises about the whole or group or collectivity. Reasoning is from the larger unit to the smaller one, without the establishment of any appropriate link between the levels.

Composition and Division are appropriately deemed fallacies because there are often highly significant structural and relational differences between wholes and parts and—most relevantly for social philosophy—between groups or collectivities and their individual members.⁶

An organized group can sing the choral movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, or have a population, or wage war - and these are things individuals as such cannot do. Individuals can fall in love, or give in to the temptation to overeat, and these are things collectives can't do.

Necessarily, there are many glosses in this preliminary exposition. There are many sorts of relationships between part and whole; my liver is a part of my body in a way quite different from that in which its padding is the part of a chair. And more to the point, in the present context, one may be a member of a group in ways that are significantly different. For instance, being a member of a family is quite different from being a member of a society such as Canadian society, and that in turn is different from being a member of a badminton club or an environmental group. These in turn differ from being a member of a class purely by predicate—as when I am a member of the class, women, in virtue of the fact, simply, that I am a woman. One may be part of, or belong to, a corporation in many different ways—as its employee, director, manager, or shareholder, for instance—and one may not belong to, but be significantly associated with it as its customer or relative of an employee. Thus there are interesting complexities about the different ways in which an individual may be a member of a group. These will not be considered here. Rather, my attention will be on logical shifts between the collective level and the individual level.

Consider the argument that *because the choir is well-balanced, each individual member of the choir is well-balanced*. This argument, I believe, would constitute an elementary and politically uncontroversial example of the Fallacy of Division. In this case, the difference between the collective and the individual level affects the meaning of the term "well-balanced," so that there is an equivocation. A choir is well-balanced insofar as its alto, soprano, tenor, and bass sections are of appropriately commensurate strength. A well-balanced individual would have to be so in terms of his or her emotions, capacities, interests, and so on. The fact that some cases of the Fallacy of Division require an accompanying Equivocation has been noted by some writers on this fallacy.⁷

Because my present concerns lie in the area of social philosophy, I shall speak of groups or collectivities (G) and their individual members (I's) rather than of wholes and parts. We might say, 'well, reasoning from G to I (Division) or from I to G (Composition) is a fallacy because it *doesn't follow* from the fact that G is X that the I's within G are X, and it *doesn't follow* from the fact

⁶ See James E. Broyle, "The Fallacies of Composition and Division" *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 8 (1975), pp. 108-113 and Frans H. van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst, *Argumentation, Communication, and Fallacies: A Pragma Dialectical Perspective* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1992), pp. 174 - 178.

⁷ See W. L. Rowe, "The Fallacy of Composition," *Mind* 1962, pp. 87 - 92 and Y. Bar-Hillel, "More on the fallacy of composition," *Mind* 1964, pp. 125 - 6.

that I's are X that G is X. It *doesn't follow*, because it is *logically possible* for G's to have features that I's don't have, and conversely.⁸ We might begin to explain the fallacies in this way. It is because groups and individuals can and often do have different characteristics (especially in such areas as structure, organization, relationships, and capacities) that we *cannot validly infer* conclusions about groups simply from premises about individuals *nor can we validly infer* conclusions about individuals simply from premises about groups.

Complexities arise, however, when we look at Composition and Division from the point of view of a non-deductivist theory of argument. Define a deductive interpretation as the first line of interpretation. Then there are at least three others: inductive, analogical, and conductive.⁹ Isn't it possible, after all, that evidence about a collectivity might give good inductive support (expectations based on observed empirical regularity) for a conclusion about its individual members—especially if the latter were suitably qualified so as to be about some or most members rather than all?¹⁰ (If Holland is a tolerant country, is it perhaps *inductively reasonable* to think that most Dutch are tolerant as individuals?) Or is it perhaps inductively reasonable that evidence about the tolerance individual members should support a conclusion to the effect that a relevant collectivity, say their country of Holland, is tolerant? Or consider the possibility of interpreting these arguments analogically—in terms of some sort of presumed fundamental resemblances between a collectivity and its members, as in the familiar device of thinking of the state on the model of an individual human being? Or perhaps the *conductive* interpretive framework is most appropriate, and one should regard premises in these arguments as offering one non-conclusive reason for their conclusion, a reason put forward as meriting consideration in conjunction with other reasons for and against that conclusion. If we depart from the simplicities of a deductivist theory of argument (one in which putatively inductive, analogical, or conductive arguments are recast on a deductive model), a more complex account of Composition and Division is required. In that context, to deem Composition and Division fallacious requires some consideration of non-deductive interpretations of the argument in question. Composition and Division will be correctly deemed fallacious moves only if we can say that in such arguments the premises do not logically imply the conclusions; nor do they provide inductive, analogical or conductive support for them.

A further complication may be found in the need for clarification of concepts in many judgments about collectives, as when paradigmatically individual notions such as apology, responsibility, blame, forgiveness, and trust are attributed to communities, societies, groups, or nation states. When this is done, there seem to be four general lines of interpretation. On three of these, Division and Composition are clearly mistaken moves, while on the fourth, they are not.

⁸ In some cases, it is not only possible that the individual should not have the feature in the same sense, it is necessary that it not have that property. For example, an individual cannot, logically, be well-balanced in just the same sense that a choir is well-balanced. And an individual cannot (I suspect also logically as well as physically) sing a four-part choral piece alone.

⁹ One might also add abductive. I do not consider this possibility here.

¹⁰ In Trudy Govier, *Social That and Human Communities* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's 1997), Chapter 9, and Trudy Govier and Wilhelm Verwoerd, "Trust and the Problem of National Reconciliation," Forthcoming, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*.

(a) First, the term in question may *not be univoca*—as in the case of the well-balanced choir and the well-balanced individual. For such cases, Composition and Division would be a fallacies based on equivocation.

(b) The interpretation may be such that the attribution may be *fundamentally collective*, and understood *non-reductively* down to the level of all or most individual citizens. An example would be a contextual explication of the distrust of nation A in nation B in terms of the unwillingness of the government of A to sign treaties with the government of B. There is a clear distinction in levels, and Composition and Division are fallacies.

(c) The interpretation may be *distributive* but in a *partially reductive* sense; that is, it involves some members, not all. Suppose, for instance, we said that what it means for nation A to distrust nation B is that most individuals, or significantly powerful individuals, in A distrust most individuals, or significantly powerful individuals, in B. Here it would be a mistake to infer from collective to any or all individual, though not a mistake to infer to some or perhaps most individuals.

(d) The interpretation may be *distributive and universal* so that it is in effect *fully reductive*. In an article about men and rape, for instance, May and Strickwerda defend the claim that *men in western societies share responsibility for rape*. They explain that they interpret this claim *distributively* (the shared responsibility devolves onto individuals) and really do apply it to *all* men in such societies.¹¹ On such an interpretation, Division will not amount to a fallacy. If men are collectively responsible for rape then, on this interpretation, every individual man shares some of that collective responsibility.

If we took a fully reductive line, as in (d), Division would never be a fallacy. If we accept the possibility of (a), (b), and (c) as alternative interpretations, and find that these possibilities are often ignored, we will identify instances of the Fallacy of Division.

Cases and Interpretations.

I now consider interpretations of several arguments that strike me as embracing the Fallacy of Division in arguing against Collective Responsibility.¹² These arguments have been given orally, so I have to ask your indulgence here, in trusting my representation of them.

Case A: The Responsibility of a Nation?

¹¹ Larry May and Robert Strickwerda, "Men in Groups: Collective Responsibility for Rape," in Christine Koggel, editor, *Moral Issues in Global Perspective*, Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1999, pp. 721-732. See pp. 728-9. May and Strickwerda interpret shared responsibility distributively. They argue that all men in western societies share responsibility for rape. Five reasons are cited, in what is clearly a conductive argument. (1) Some men rape (2) Some men express, in their patterns of male interaction, support for rape. (3) Men are like rapists, since studies have shown that rapists do not significantly differ from ordinary men. (4) A great many men have failed to act to prevent rapes when they could have done so. (5) Since they do not have to fear rape as women do, men have a comparative advantage over women, who become dependent on men for protection, and thus all men benefit from rape. Personally, I do not support this account, though a consideration of its merits is beyond the topic of this paper.

¹² Note that the discussion would be essentially the same if we were to substitute other notions related to accountability for that of collective responsibility. We might for instance speak of blameworthiness, deep flaws of character, or moral debts owed, and the central logical points would remain the same.

Consider the following argument put forward in a discussion at the recent conference of Concerned Philosophers for Peace.

Argument A.

- (1) If Germany is collectively responsible for the crimes of the Holocaust, then each and every individual German is responsible for the crimes of the Holocaust.¹³
 - (2a) Individual Germans played morally varying roles during the Holocaust.
- So,
- (2) It is not the case that each and every individual German is responsible for the crimes of the Holocaust. Therefore,
 - (3) It is not the case that Germany as a nation bears collective responsibility for the crimes of the Holocaust.

Here I shall assume, as seems plausible, that (2a) is acceptable as a premise, and (2a) supports (2). Premises (1) and (2) deductively entail the conclusion (3) in a valid *Modus Tollens*. The main argument, from (1) and (2) to (3), is deductively valid and commits no fallacy. If the Fallacy of Division is involved in this argument, it is because it is embraced in the conditional statement that constitutes premise (1). Premise (1) will hold true only if we assume a *universal distributivist* interpretation of collective responsibility, which in this context means that for the German nation to bear a responsibility for the Holocaust requires that *each and every German person does so*. I would submit that premise (1) should be rejected, on the grounds that it is grossly implausible and it assumes uncritically (d), one of four possible interpretations of what it might mean for the German nation to have a responsibility in this case.

We may label the flaws inherent in this premise in various ways - as is often the case with fallacies. We can say that it is an unacceptable premise. Or we can say that argument A involves Straw Man, which is manifest in this premise because it presumes a simplistic and implausible interpretation of collective responsibility. We can also say that, quite correctly, though it is deductively valid, Argument A involves an erroneous shift from the collective to the individual level, characteristic of the Fallacy of Division.¹⁴

Consider now A*, a revised version of A.

¹³ Some committed atrocities; others supported the Nazis verbally and by vote and colluded with atrocities; others were passive; others opposed, others helped to protect Jews and other prospective victims; many were not born, and so on. For a more complete discussion, see David H. Jones, *Moral Responsibility in the Holocaust: a Study in the Ethics of Character*. (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield 1999.)

¹⁴ If I am right in my analysis here, several themes pertinent to fallacy theory are illustrated. First, an argument may commit or embrace more than one fallacy. Second, if one is going to use fallacy labels, it is not necessary to pick just one and insist that it offers an exhaustive characterization of what is going on, and going wrong, in an argument. Third, an argument may be deductively valid and nevertheless involve a fallacy, in the reasoning underlying a premise. Fourth, a fallacy may underlie an argument in the sense that it is in some way represented in a premise or the support for a premise; it need not involve only the support relationship between premises and conclusions. These points are of course, not new, but they may be worth remarking here nonetheless.

*Argument A**

- (1) If the German nation is responsible for the crimes of the Holocaust, then some individual Germans bear individual responsibility for some of the crimes of the Holocaust.
- (2) It is not the case that any individual German bears any individual responsibility for the crimes of the Holocaust.

Therefore,

- (3) The German nation is not responsible for the crimes of the Holocaust.

A* is again a valid *Modus Tollens*. It does not commit the Fallacy of Division. However, it fails to be a cogent argument because premise (2) is almost certainly false.

Case B: War Crimes Trials

This case is similar to the previous one. It is taken from a similar context, that of conference discussion, but this time the conference was an inter-disciplinary one on Dilemmas of Reconciliation, held at the University of Calgary in June, 1999.¹⁵ In a conversation about the trial of individuals for war crimes, an international jurist of considerable experience and renown claimed that only *individuals* could properly be tried for war crimes. This was the way the international legal system worked; groups, nations, committees, and governments did not do things, they could not act, and in any event, they could not be held accountable within a criminal justice system, and placed on trial. This man was asked whether many of the acts in question (for instance, Serbs ordering, establishing, and then running a concentration camp in which thousands of men were starved to death and hundreds of women systematically raped and sexually tortured) did not require collective participation and support. He responded first with the ontological claim that groups can't do anything; only individuals can act. *Serbia* didn't murder or torture or rape anybody. Individuals did that and yes, these individuals happened to be Serbian. He then added that the notion of collective responsibility must be resisted because it means that *all individuals in a nation will be tarred with the same moral brush*. This baneful stereotyping perpetuates moral hatred, lead to further conflict, and work strongly against reconciliation. He added that identifying and separating off individuals who have played leading or conspicuous roles and trying them for specific deeds, in international tribunals, is practical and feasible. These individuals must be legally accountable for their actions and, if found guilty, appropriately punished. Doing this will distinguish culpable individuals from their nation or ethnic group. The trials and ensuing punishment will reassure victim groups that justice is being done - thus contributing to reconciliation and diminishing hatred and conflict.

Thus,

¹⁵ Conference on "Dilemmas of Reconciliation," University of Calgary, June 2 - 6, 1999. The discussion was between philosopher Larry May and Judge Richard Goldstone, presently a member of the Constitutional Court of South Africa and formerly Chief Prosecutor of the ICTY (Tribunal charged with prosecuting crimes of war and genocide in the Former Yugoslavia, The Hague).

Argument B

- (1) If we hold a collective responsible for despicable deeds, then we will make all individuals within that collective objects of moral hatred.
- (2a) To make all individuals within a collective objects of moral hatred is objectionable and dangerous. So,
- (2) We should not make all individuals within any collective objects of moral hatred.
- Therefore,
- (3) We should not hold any collective responsible for despicable deeds.

This argument looks like a *Modus Tollens* too, but due to the 'should's' it cannot exactly be formalized as such.¹⁶ The argument is really an argument from consequences. If we do P, Q will result, and Q is undesirable so we should not do P. As with Argument A, we can ask whether Argument B embraces the fallacy of Division. And indeed, the first premise does seem to do so, in asserting that collective responsibility will automatically devolve onto individuals. If a nation is judged to be collectively responsible for these terrible crimes, then all individual nationals will be the object of moral hatred. Why? Presumably because they will be deemed *individually responsible* as an implication of the *collective responsibility*. Thus we again have the Fallacy of Division.

However, there is an ambiguity in (1), I think. Was the jurist himself committing the Fallacy of Division? Or was he, rather, predicting that significant numbers of other people would make this mistake and infer individual blameworthiness from collective responsibility? So was his point perhaps that because many people would make this mistake, insisting on collective responsibility would perpetuate baneful stereotypes and moral hatred?¹⁷ He needn't make the mistake himself. To take account of this possibility, consider:

Argument B:*

- 1) If we hold collectives responsible for heinous deeds, we will stimulate stereotypical moral hatred against the individual members of those collectives.

¹⁶ And this point is significant, as we shall see. Interestingly, what I have called here a 'moral modus *tollens*' seems to be an instance of pseudo-logical argument, as that notion is defined by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca. It rather closely resembles a deductively valid form, so we if accept the premises we may come to believe that the conclusion has been proven, interpreting the argument as deductively valid. However, if we do interpret it in this way, we give it too much force. I will argue that the argument is best understood in a *conductive* framework - as specifying adverse consequences that provide some reason pain holding collectives responsible for such serious wrongs as war crimes.

¹⁷ Similar issue arises with some slippery slope arguments. If there is a perfectly good distinction between case C and cases D, E, F, G, and so on but people are not generally able or likely to draw that distinction, then one might argue that permitting C will lead society or governing individuals to permit the others. And then, if these further cases are objectionable, in leading to their permission, case C has an objectionable consequence, so C becomes objectionable (in a moral *Modus Tollens*). A premise may be empirical to the effect that many people are likely to make the mistake of not drawing a crucial distinction. A person can use this argument without himself failing to distinguish C from the other cases. Compare my "What's Wrong with Slippery Slope Arguments?" in Trudy Govier, *The Philosophy of Argument* (Newport News, VA: Vale Press 1999), Chapter Five.

- 2) We should not stimulate stereotypical moral hatred against the individual members of any collective.

Therefore,

- 3) We should never hold any collective responsible for committing a heinous deed.

Again, we have a 'Moral *Modus Tollens*.' More accurately, Argument B* is a policy argument which cites adverse consequences as a reason again any policy of holding collectives responsible for heinous deeds. B* does not embrace the Fallacy of Division in premise (1) because that premise depends on a broadly *empirical claim* to the effect that people will tend to confuse and conflate the collective and individual levels. And indeed, there seems would seem to be rather ample evidence just such an empirical claim. Argument B* *predicts* distributive blaming and hatred as empirical consequences of institutionalizing collective responsibility. It does not condone them, either from the point of view of logic or from that of ethics.

I would argue that B* can plausibly be interpreted an element of a conductive or good reasons argument. It can be interpreted as specifying *one reason* against the holding of collectives such as nations and ethnic groups responsible for serious wrongdoing. The status of B* as what I have called a 'moral *Modus Tollens*,' as contrasted with a deductive valid argument, helps us to draw a crucial distinction at this point. The *reason is not* conclusive as it would be if we had a true *Modus Tollens*. If we accept B* as an argument with *some weight*, we have nothing definitive against the notion of collective responsibility. We have simply granted *one* important reason against it.¹⁸

Significantly, the success of B* in a conductive context would allow room for reasons supportive of collective responsibility. It allows for the possibility of other reasons for and against attributions of collective responsibility. As mentioned earlier, a factor counting against collective responsibility, distinct from those considered here, is that penalties and punishments imposed on collectives nearly always devolve onto individuals, often painfully and unfairly. Among supportive factors, I would count the claim that some wrongs are of such a nature that they simply could not be committed without the cooperation and collusion of many people. Another arises from the fact that the effects of wrongs on victims and their descendants may outlast the lives of any persons who could plausibly be regarded as individual perpetrators, so that denying collective agency and responsibility leaves no present agent to be held accountable. One may also argue against the current practice of holding individuals responsible in these contexts on the grounds that it may amount to scape-goating. If hundreds of people were involved in terrible wrongs, and some few individuals are tried for it, there are problems of selectivity and justice.

¹⁸ See Trudy Govier, *A Practical Study of Argument*, Fifth Edition. (Belmont, Ca: Wadsworth, 2001), Chapter 11, for a more full discussion of conductive arguments and the mistake of taking *a reason* against (or for) X to be a *conclusive reason* against (or for) X. The mistake is called there Tunnel Vision on the grounds that a phenomenon is seen exclusively in terms of one factor pertaining to it, while other significant factors are ignored. See also Trudy Govier, *The Philosophy of Argument* (Newport News, Va: Vale Press, 1999), Chapter Ten, "Reasoning with Pros and Cons: Conductive Arguments Revisited."

Concluding Comments

But these comments notwithstanding, it is not my purpose here to offer a defence of collective responsibility here—or even to defend a preferred interpretation of it. Rather, my purpose has been to explore common lines of objection to the allocating or assuming of responsibility by collectives, which seemed to me to embrace the Fallacy of Division. I believe that some such arguments, like A and B here, do indeed commit that Fallacy, though others, like A* and B*, do not. I suggest that these examples indicate the importance of looking again at Composition and Division in the context of political debate about such topics as past wrongs and reconciliation, and many topics in social philosophy that arise from them.